DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 247 CS 204 908

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TITLE The Rhetorical Theories of George Campbell and Kenneth Burke.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (30th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 5-7, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Intellectual History; Persuasive Discourse; Philosophy; *Rhetoric; *Social Change; Theories
IDENTIFIERS Burke (Kenneth); Campbell (George)

ABSTRACT

Points of similarity exist between rhetorical theorists George Campbell and Kenneth Burke, based on their acceptance of the universality of human nature. These similarities include the following: both use "strategic" definitions of rhetoric that are widely encompassing; Burke's central doctrine of "identification" resembles Campbells's idea of "sympathy"; Burke's "cluster analysis" parallels the association-of-ideas psychology pervading Campbell's eighteenth-century empiricist background; and Campbell appears to anticipate some of Burke's "dramatistic" concepts, in particular those of scene (context), dialogue (dialectic), and motive. Burke's work is motivated by a broadly ethical anxiety complicated by ambivalence toward the presumed source of anxiety--the scientific age; this is also true of Campbell. Both also saw the fostering of intellectual cooperation as a role of religious civilization. (DF)

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THE RHETORICAL THEORIES OF GEORGE CAMPBELL AND KENNETH BURKE

A paper presented at the
Conference on College Composition and Communication
in Minneapolis, Minnesota
April 6, 1979

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The following suggestions for a comparison of Kenneth Burke and George Campbell arise from my suspicion that the historical tradition of rhetoric, far from being a superficial inquiry into expedient formalities, arises from intense concern for the uses of verbal communication in the formation of a society--a civilization, a common mythology, a mutuality of belief, or a common viewpoint and ground of understanding. Rhetoricians have tried to see life steadily and whole by avoiding dialectical reasoning, a form of thinking limited by definitions and assumptions and often too narrowly focused to satisfy men's souls. Language, rhetoricians have realized, is not exact, and so functions more appropriately in persuasion than in proof. Whether or not my "suspicion" is justified with reference to rhetoric in general, I find this commitment in both George Campbell and Kenneth Burke.

In A Grammar of Motives Burke agrees, in effect, that the Enlightenment, the general scene that gave motivation to George Campbell's reflections on rhetoric, brought with it the modern, scientific view of man.[1] Out of the effort to view human nature as a subject for scientific scrutiny came the empirical philosophy which, at least in a negative sense, has more or less dominated English and American

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thought up to the present time. The immediate emphasis of empiricism was on epistemology, the process of perceiving and knowing. Since the only kind of knowledge that was available to man, according to empiricists, was what came by way of sense perception, it was perceived knowledge that had to be shared in communication, if sharing and communication were possible at all. Radical empiricism cast doubt on whether there could be true communication; the philosophy that began by trying radically to objectivize the objects of knowledge, including human nature, ended by radically subjectivizing the knower. Communication of totally subjective knowledge is impossible.

David Hume assumed that human nature was uniform, and George Campbell emphasized the importance of universal human nature in developing a theory of rhetoric. Burke also aligns himself with this tradition when he says, in The Philosophy of Literary Form, "I find nothing more 'contemporary' than the records of heresies, sects, and schisms that flourished centuries ago, which are by no means gone with their times, but are mutatis mutandis all vigorous today."[2] A bit later he speaks cautiously of "overlap" among human categories, first insofar as men all have "the same neural and muscular structure" and then in terms of "the concrete details of social structure." Finally, he accounts the nature of language and "the human mind itself" to be universal, "to belong to the same class (to have a common substance or essence)." Ten years earlier Burke had declared in Counter-Statement, "the various kinds of mood, feelings, emotions, perceptions, sensations, and attitudes discussed in the manuals of psychology and exemplified in works of art, we consider universal experiences."[4] Were it other-

wise, Burke would be bereft of the means to resist the fragmentation of our world that troubles him in much the same way that the implications of Hume's thought troubled George Campbell. Although Burke is intellectually cautious, he is evidently building a case for a humanistic rhetorical theory rooted in universal human nature. This concern finds expression in his use of the proverb as the type of all literary productions.[5]

Supposing that Burke does share with Campbell some sort of commitment to the idea of universal human nature, I imagine that any interest that this discussion might provoke would stem from curiosity as to what other points of similarity could possibly exist between two rhetorical theorists so apparently remote from each other. There are, indeed, some pertinent points of comparison that are interesting in their own rights and which cast some new light on the rhetorical theory of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. I wish to suggest tentatively the following points of comparison:

1) Both Burke and Campbell use "strategic" definitions of rhetoric that are widely encompassing;

2) Burke's central doctrine of "identification" resembles in important ways Campbell's idea of "sympathy";

3) Burke's "cluster analysis" has parallels with the association of ideas psychology pervading eighteenth-century empiricism; and

4) Campbell may anticipate some of Burke's "dramatistic" concepts, in particular, <u>scene</u> (context), <u>dialogue</u> (dialectic), and, perhaps most suggestively, <u>motive</u>.[6]

Since we do not have time to explore each of these points, I wish to focus on motive. Seeking a motive for Kenneth Burke's contributions to the theory of rhetoric in his situation, I come to the conclusion that his situation is one of threatening confusion tending toward the destruction of values, or, at least, to the painful transfiguration of values to which Burke, despite his ironic detachment, feels a commitment. When Burke prepared the second edition of Permanence and Change, first published in 1935, he added a prologue dated 1953, in which he recalls,

> The book . . . was written in the early days of the Great Depression, at a time when there was a general feeling that our traditional ways were headed for a tremendous change, maybe even a permanent collapse. It is such a book as authors in those days sometimes put together, to keep themselves from falling apart. Not knowing quite where he was, this particular author took notes on "orientation." Not being sure how to read the signs, he took notes on "interpretation." Finding himself divided, he took notes on division (or, as he calls it in this book, "perspectives by incongruity"). Looking for some device by which to integrate the muddle, he asked about the possibility of a "resimplification" that would not be an over-simplification. In sum, being in a motivational quandary, he wrote on "motivation."[7]

From this and many such passages, indeed from the tenor of Burke's writings, it is clear that his work is motivated by a broadly ethical anxiety complicated by ambivalence toward the presumed source of the anxiety. Burke explores ambivalence with much cogency in Permanence and Change under the heading "Occupational Psychoses" (a choice of words without pejorative connotation, he assures us). In, about, above, and beneath these psychoses, and mainly responsible for their perplexities, is the "technological psychosis."

> It is the one psychosis which is, perhaps, in its basic pattern, contributing a new principle to the world. It is at the center of our glories and our distress.[8]

Immediately following this declaration, Burke offers three rubrics for analysis of the historical patterns of the psychoses: magic, religion, and science. The transition from the religious perspective to the scientific was well advanced by George Campbell's time, for it had begun with Copernicus and Galileo, as well as Bacon, whose rationalization of induction was fundamental to the new viewpoint. And the Reformation, though it had some transcendent purposes, contributed to the transition. Campbell, who was a professional religionist, shared most of the attitudes of the scientific age, though he balked at its more radical expressions. According to Burke, the scientific psychosis reached its full expression in the philosophy of the English Utilitarians, who declared usefulness to be the criterion by which ethical judgments must be tested. The doctrine of utility completed the secularization of values during Campbell's century, aided by the most advanced industrial technology in Europe.

> The transcendental accounts of moral origin now gave way to the notion that considerations of service and interest both do shape and should shape our religious, ethical, aesthetic, and even cosmological judgments.[9]

The "sub-stance" underlying Burke's motives, revealed in his remarks about the technological age, obviously corresponds to Campbell's "substance,"[10] insofar as Campbell became critical of "scientific" philosophy.

George Campbell attempted more or less successfully to bring about a synthesis of classical rhetoric with contemporary philosophy, specifically British empiricism. He was fully convinced that empirical epistemology was on the right track. He calls Bacon, the founder of empiricism, "the most comprehensive genius in philosophy that has appeared in modern times."[11] But Campbell became greatly alarmed at the skepticism of Hume and the threat, which Campbell saw more clearly than many of his

contemporaries in the Scottish Kirk, toward religion--not to mention the centrality of Christianity in Western culture. His "strategy," in the Burkean sense, was to rest the theory of persuasion or conviction on emotion, which Hume had established as the governor of human volition in place of deposed reason.

Campbell had just graduated from Marischal College in Aberdeen when Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature was published, or, as Hume said, "fell deadborn from the press,"[12] in 1739. It is quite likely that Campbell heard of Hume's essay in Edinburgh, where he had gone to study law; but he presumably did not appreciate its significance until the revised version appeared in 1748 with the Essay on Miracles, for it was not until 1762 that Campbell replied to Hume's essay by publishing A Dissertation on Miracles, an expansion of a sermon preached before the Aberdeen synod in 1760. Campbell's reputation as an able controversialist was immediately established among his generally partisan countrymen. The argument of the Dissertation rests upon the concept of "moral certainty," a concept which is central to the theory of rhetoric. It was during the years just prior to 1760 that Campbell composed the chapters of The Philosophy of Rhetoric in which the idea of moral certainty is discussed.[13]

In 1757 Campbell left the small parish seventeen miles west of Aberdeen, where he had been the pastor for nine years, to accept a call from an Aberdeen church. Within six months Campbell had joined with Thomas Reid and four others to establish the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen, familiarly known as "The Wise Club," one of those remarkable societies that sprang up in Scotland in the middle of the eighteenth

century and claimed as members some of the brightest stars of the Scottish Enlightenment. The Aberdeen Society was the cradle of the Common Sense philosophy, of which Thomas Reid was the chief exponent, and the members produced numerous literary and philosophical works of merit, some of them directed against Hume. One of these was Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric, some chapters of which were first read to the club before final publication in 1776. The men of the Society were troubled by the rejection of their most fundamental and cherished beliefs by the intellectual world to which they aspired to belong. It was possible to ignore the French, but when their own countryman, David Hume, attempted to demolish the philosophical foundations of their faith, which had drifted towards liberal theology and were consequently vulnerable, they searched for a rebuttal. One after another, the members of "The Wise Club" racked their not inconsiderable brains to provide an answer to Hume. In Kenneth Burke's terms, this was the situation which provided the motives for a variety of rhetorical actions. The most popularly successful product of their efforts was the superficial and abusive Essay on Truth by James Beattie, whose reputation as author of The Minstrel qualified him in the public mind as a philosophical disputant. However, the society's most important achievements were Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense and Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric.

The rationalistic philosophers of the French Enlightenment had been persuaded that objective and universal certainty was to be found only in "natural philosophy" built on Newtonian principles. But British empiricism, starting from premises which seemed consistent with the New Science,

reached radically subjectivistic and individualistic conclusions. The apparently coherent epistemology and psychology of Locke, carried to their suicidal conclusion by Hume, either led to utter skepticism or reinforced tendencies toward solipsism that threatened to disrupt the cultural consensus of Western civilization. Campbell's response was to base a philosophy of rhetoric, the art that seeks the available means of achieving consensus, on the epistemology which threatened it and, if possible, to blunt the threat itself by recourse to rhetorical concepts of "moral certainty" and "probability." In some respects, Campbell's response to Hume parallels Aristotle's response to Plato, but that takes us beyond the limits of this paper. We are concerned with Kenneth Burke, a sort of twentieth-century Aristotle.

Campbell wrote his theory of rhetoric in conventional, secular terms from a specific and formally ecclesiastical background. Burke, on the other hand, writes to a secular age from a secular academic background, using theological concepts and terminology. Whether or not the extrinsic "revelation" of which Burke speaks has transcendent[15] significance to him, he nevertheless contrasts religious psychosis with both the magical and technological psychoses, on the grounds that only the religious paradigm focuses specifically on human forces for its rationalization. For Burke, the essence of religious civilization is cooperation. "Religious thought," he says, "became the device in the mental sphere for ordering cooperative habits under . . . complex conditions."[16] Making allowances for differences in theology, I think Burke's and Campbell's concerns are indistinguishable at this point.

Burke describes "critical and imaginative works" as "answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose."[17] Burke's lifetime work has been his "answer" to the twentieth century, as Campbell's was to parallel dilemmas of the Enlightenment. In popular usage, the term "rhetoric" suggests language without substance, words without corresponding realities. Could it be that all of the great edifice of modern science is erected upon an arbitrary choice of perspectives, hence on "a word"? Having lost faith with everything else, believing that promises are all "rhetoric," modern man has an enormous psychological investment in the scientific and technological perspective. The number of general critiques of scientific civilization keeps growing; the prevailing paradigm shows signs of disintegration. We may not be able to ignore Burke's diffuse analysis as we have been able to forget Campbell's very limited response to a problem in intellectual history. Campbell's rhetoric appeared toward the beginning of the age; Burke's rhetoric comes at what may be toward the end of the age. Both have seen rhetorical theory as a means of restoring balance to our perspective.

NOTES

[1]A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives (Cleveland: World publishing, 1962), pp. 311-17. Burke traces the origins of modernism not as a historian but with recognition of the historical ambiguities and complexities; in Attitudes Toward History, 2d ed. (Los Altos, Calif.: Hermes Publications, 1959), pp. 135-158, he locates the beginnings of modern social organization in the Reformation and the Renaissance.

[2]The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action, 2d ed. (New York: Vintage Press, 1961), p. x; of course Burke's observations on the mutationis are fundamental to his rhetorical theory.

[3]Ibid., p. 3; cf. p. 62; and see the "Introduction" to The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1970),

[4]Counter-Statement, 2d ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1968), p. 149.

[5]The Philosophy of Literary Form, pp. 3-5, 256-59.

[6]All of these, or related terms, appear many times in Burke's essays and books. A Grammar of Motives and A Rhetoric of Motives are, of course, basic, but also important are The Philosophy of Literary Form, especially "Semantic and Poetic Meaning," and Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose, 2d ed. (Los Altos: Hermes Publications, 1954). In Campbell, The Philosophy of Rhetoric, Bitzer, ed. (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), see Bk. I, chaps. 1, 5-7.

[7]Permanence and Change, p. xiii.

[8]Ibid., p. 44.

[9]Ibid.

[10]A Grammar of Motives, pp. 21-23.

[11]The Philosophy of Rhetoric, p. xlix.

[12]An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Charles W. Hendel, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1955), p. 4. Hume's biographical sketch, "My Own Life," is traditionally published with the Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding since its first appearance in the 1777 edition.

[13]The Philosophy of Rhetoric, chap. 5. See also W. S. Howell, Eighteenth Century British Logic and Rhetoric (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 577.

[14]See Permanence and Change, pp. 33, 256.

[15]On transcendence, see Attitudes Toward History, pp. 336-38; Permanence and Change, passim; and The Rhetoric of Religion, p. 5.

[16]Permanence and Change, p. 44.

[17]The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 3.